

Healthy Living

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DARNELL RENEE/Special Contributor

Jenny Holland of Euless employed a doula to ease her delivery of Katrina, 8 months. "I was thankful to have her there," Ms. Holland says.

Not what you'd expect

Area women turn
to alternative
pregnancy and
delivery options

By **MICHELE CHAN SANTOS**
Special Contributor

Jennifer Touchet, a community organizer who lives in Oak Cliff, had a history of back problems and back surgery, and when she became pregnant with her first child, she was concerned about the strain on her back a pregnancy would cause.

So she chose to have massage therapy during her pregnancy.

"I decided for all kinds of reasons, emotional and physical, to have massage be part of my prenatal care, and it worked," Ms. Touchet says. "When I did have some flare-ups with my back or with sciatica, it always, always helped."

There have never been more choices than there are today for women in the Dallas-Fort Worth area among services related to conception, pregnancy, delivery and postpartum care. In both mainstream and

alternative health care, a cornucopia of providers, from hypnotists to doulas, lactation consultants to pregnancy yoga instructors, acupuncturists to aromatherapists, are available to assist women in various steps along the path to motherhood.

To help expectant women and their partners sort through the selections available to them, we've spotlighted three local alternative therapies and the mothers who used them.

Help during labor

Mother: Jenny Holland of Euless. She and her husband, Steve, are the parents of Susanna, 3, and Katrina, 8 months. Ms. Holland is the office manager for the Birth and Women Center in Dallas; Mr. Holland works at Nokia as an e-commerce manager.

Alternative choice they made: The Hollands hired Linda Worzer of Richardson, a certified doula, lactation consultant and childbirth educator, to be their doula during Katrina's birth. Doulas "educate, reassure, comfort and nurture" mothers during their labor and delivery, Ms. Worzer says.

Services and cost: A certified doula generally charges between \$500 and \$700. The initial interview is free, and then there are usually two visits with the mother beforehand. (Many doulas will accompany the mother to a prenatal visit, to meet the obstetrician or midwife doing the delivery.) Once labor begins, the doula will stay with the mother through the labor and delivery, usually until two hours after delivery, and then do one or two postpartum visits. Doulas do not deliver the baby; they are there only to support the parents.

How it went: Ms. Worzer met with the Hollands about two months before Ms. Holland was due to have Katrina. They talked about what Ms. Holland wanted in a birth — "I didn't want an epidural or a whole lot of interventions," she says — and discussed the couple's expectations.

Ms. Worzer was there throughout the labor, walking with the couple as Jenny's contractions increased, pressing rice socks (filled with long-grain rice, and heated) on her back to help with the pain. Ms. Holland delivered her baby only an hour and a half after her water broke.

"I was thankful to have her there," Ms. Holland says. "I knew she was a calm voice." Mr. Holland was also glad, his wife says. "She didn't take his place; it was someone else to support us."

Resources and tips: The Dallas Doula Network has 108 members. When you interview the doula, make sure she is accredited and that your personalities mesh well. Every doula should be able to tell you her level of experience and give you references, says Ms. Worzer, who is a charter member of DONA (Doulas of North America). Ask about her philosophy of birth. Once you've found a doula, it's a good idea to bring her to a prenatal appointment, so she can meet your doctor or midwife. Most physicians are very accepting of doulas. "In Dallas, at least, the doctors and nurses are great, just fantastic" about working with doulas, Ms. Worzer says.

For more information: Ms. Worzer's site, with information about the Dallas



NAN COULTER/Special Contributor

Jennifer Touchet, at home in Oak Cliff with husband Sam and their children, had massage during her pregnancies with Nathan, 4, Abraham, 2 months, and Jacqueline, 5. "I saw it as part of my prenatal care," she says.

WHAT PHYSICIANS SAY

Stacy Brooks, a spokeswoman for the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists in Washington, D.C., refers consumers to the ACOG's official guide, *Your Pregnancy and Birth, Fourth Edition*, a book that is "drawn from the knowledge of a committee of expert obstetricians and the collective expertise of more than 40,000 ACOG Fellows."

When discussing complementary and alternative medicine (CAM), which the College defines to include acupuncture, aromatherapy, chiropractic care, hypnosis and massage, here's what the book says:

"You may have already been using some form of CAM before you became pregnant. If you want to continue using it, be sure to tell your doctor about it. This is a way to be sure it will be safe to use during your pregnancy. Also, be sure to tell your CAM provider you are pregnant. You also may want to try an approach you have heard about but never tried. Again, talk it over with your doctor. In all cases, it is important to seek CAM treatment from a qualified practitioner. As with any treatment, CAM methods help some people and not others. If you want to use CAM, ask your doctor to help you find an approach that is best for you and your baby."

Doula Network, is www.naturalbeginningsonline.com.

Encouraging conception

Mothers: Yvette, 40, and Amy, 37.

Alternative choice they made: To help treat their infertility with acupuncture. Both women had acupuncture in preparation for in-vitro fertilization, after more than a year of fertility treatments (including injecting fertility drugs) had failed. Yvette did three months of acupuncture before her IVF process started. She became pregnant after one attempt with IVF, and her baby was born in February of this year. Amy became pregnant before her IVF process ever began (during her three months of acupuncture). Her child just turned 1.

Why they're keeping their last names private: Both women say that they have not shared with many friends, family members or co-workers the extent of their struggles with infertility.

Services and cost: Both Yvette and

Amy were the patients of Lin Zhou, an acupuncturist with Acupuncture & Alternative Medicine of Dallas. Dr. Zhou has treated women for reproductive and infertility issues for 20 years. She frequently works with women who are about to begin the IVF process. Patients have acupuncture sessions two to three times a week, beginning at least four weeks before the IVF process, continuing until the embryo transfer. Each acupuncture session costs from \$60 to \$100.

For more information: www.acupuncture-dfw.com

Does it really work? Some studies indicate that acupuncture helps IVF treatments. A study published in the April 2002 edition of the medical journal *Fertility and Sterility* found that acupuncture increases the chance of pregnancy for women undergoing IVF. Acupuncture is frequently mentioned in alternative health and, increasingly, mainstream publications as a treatment for infertility. Medical profes-

sionals are recognizing this too: Dr. Zhou recently discussed acupuncture and infertility at a meeting of the Dallas Fertility Nurses Society in Plano.

Reducing stress: "Western studies say acupuncture stimulates the nervous system to produce endorphins to help our bodies to relax and improve our moods," Dr. Zhou says. "It helps the patients become calmer and more at ease. Stress is a very big issue during the in-vitro process, because there's a high level of physical and emotional stress."

What one mother says: Amy says she was emotionally and physically exhausted after 18 months of fertility treatments. Amy is from China and was comfortable seeking an acupuncturist's help. She had acupuncture twice a week and also drank a tea made with traditional Chinese herbs. First, Amy's painful PMS symptoms went away, and then a couple of months later she became pregnant. "My husband and I are very grateful to her, that she helped us have this baby."

Relaxation during pregnancy

Mother: Jennifer Touchet, a community organizer who lives in Oak Cliff. She and her husband, Sam, a treasury manager at a hospital, have three children: Jacqueline, 5, Nathan, 4, and Abraham, 2 months.

Alternative choice she made: To have massage therapy during pregnancy. Ms. Touchet's massage therapist was Melody Cook, a full-time operating room nurse who is also a registered massage therapist specializing in pregnancy and postpartum massage.

Services and cost: An hour of pregnancy massage with Ms. Cook is \$65. Ms. Cook also teaches a class where she shows the husbands or partners of pregnant women various massage techniques they can use during labor. This class is an hour and a half and costs \$95; the couple also receive a manual to help them practice.

For more information: Ms. Cook's Web site is www.ccx.net/massage.

Benefits: Ms. Cook says that pregnancy massage helps expectant women with a variety of conditions including varicose veins, heartburn, swelling, sciatica and leg aches.

What the mother says: Ms. Touchet said the massages, which she had during all three of her pregnancies, helped her back (formerly injured) stay strong, and helped her keep up her strength and energy while pregnant. "It helps you relax. I didn't see it as a luxury," Ms. Touchet says. "I saw it as part of my prenatal care. It helped with my recovery as well."

Michele Chan Santos is an Austin freelance writer.